

Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: June 30, 2009

Subject: Commuter Rail System Study – SRT Meeting #1

In Attendance:

Coolidge: Aaron Bruce

Pinal County: David Maestas

Florence: Mark Thompson

MAG: Marc Pearsall, Kevin Wallace

Maricopa: Kellee Kelley

URS: Tim Baldwin, Rick Pilgrim, Matt Carpenter, Jennifer Pyne

Peoria: Susan Daluddung, David Moody, Lisa Estrada

Goodman Schwartz: David Schwartz

Phoenix: Maria Hyatt

Meeting Notes:

Introduction

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, initiated the meeting by introducing the presentation which followed the agenda as outlined:

- Introductions and Roles/Responsibilities of Team
- Project Background and Overview
- Study Goals, Objectives and Factors
- Schedule
- Coordination/Milestones
- Next Meeting

Introductions and Roles/Responsibilities of Team

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, introduced the study team and the roles of each firm as part of the System Study as follows:

URS: Project management, operations, stations/land use

Gannett-Fleming: Design engineer

Goodman-Schwartz: Public involvement

Lima & Associates: Rail operations and GIS mapping

Lonnie E. Blydes Consulting: Railroad coordination

Dunbar Transportation Consulting: Technical assistance for ridership forecasting

Parsons Brinckerhoff: Technical assistance for ridership forecasting

Tim Baldwin stressed the importance of the System Review Team in this study process – the first of its kind in the MAG region. The System Review Team is composed of the Project Management Team (MAG, ADOT, RPTA & METRO), Union Pacific Railroad, BNSF Railway, and local jurisdictions.

Project Background and Overview

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, provided an overview of the growth patterns experienced within the MAG region. He outlined the expected population growth within and around the MAG region, including the Hassayampa Valley, Hidden Valley, and Northern Pinal County. Potential commuter rail corridors, rail extensions, future LRT routes, future & potential freeway network alignments, and existing freeway networks were reviewed.

Tim Baldwin explained the origin of the commuter rail service consideration for the MAG region. More specifically, Tim explained that previous transit studies recommended commuter rail service operating on freight rail lines could offer an alternative transportation mode in primary transportation corridors in the region.

In 2004 Proposition 400 funded the evaluation of commuter rail transit as an alternative mode of transportation. The MAG Commuter Rail Strategic Plan provided the initial level of analysis for the region. Partners within the study process included the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), Pinal County, Arizona Department of Transportation, METRO Rail, Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA), and a newly formed commuter rail stakeholders group.

David Schwartz, MAG Study Team, outlined the stakeholder and public involvement process entailed in the Grand Avenue, Yuma West, and System Study. David explained that all three stakeholder involvement processes entailed within the studies have been consolidated into essentially one process.

David Schwartz mentioned that an open house format for Grand Avenue and Yuma West study corridors. David added that the SRT members should advise the MAG Study Team who should be involved in the stakeholder process.

Rick Pilgrim, MAG Study Team, indicated that during the MAG commuter rail strategic planning process there were about 100-150 participants in regional stakeholder meetings. Rick added that the overall strategy was to develop a dialogue for the commuter rail mode, address congestion in region, and to help decision makers make decisions concerning future population growth. There will likely be no action concerning

commuter rail if it is not on the table during the decision making process. Rick also mentioned the railroads will be paying close attention to the planning process as it continues.

David Schwartz, MAG Study Team, mentioned a database of contacts was developed during the commuter rail strategic planning process, and will be fleshed out as future commuter rail planning process occurs.

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, indicated the Strategic Plan provided a 'get started' scenario – providing typical characteristics of each corridor. These characteristics include:

- 5 trains per peak period in peak direction
- 1 reverse commute trip in peak period
- 1 mid-day trip
- 1 evening trip
- 4-car trains
- ~10,000 riders/day
- \$50-400 million capital cost

Rick Pilgrim, MAG Study Team, shared that a concurrent planning process to commuter rail in the region is the MAG Regional Transit Framework Study (RTFS). Rick confirmed the RTFS is part of the statewide transportation planning framework to provide a multi-modal transportation strategy to achieve a sustainable transportation future. The RTFS defined long range transit needs in planning horizons 2030 and 2050.

Some of the assumptions reviewed within the commuter rail service study process include:

- Continue transit spending at same level
- What would occur if spending was similar to peer cities?
- What would occur if spending was similar to highest spending peer city, e.g. Seattle?

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, walked through the characteristics of commuter rail technology. He explained that commuter rail can fit within the Maricopa/Pinal area. He added that this technology can serve a role in this type of setting. Tim mentioned that station spacing can be five, seven, eight, etc. miles apart. Tim added that accidents are very rare and become more infrequent when railroads invest in infrastructure.

With respect to vehicles, Tim Baldwin shared that commuter rail is larger, heavier, and roomier than light rail. Commuter rail vehicles operate at a higher maximum speed, have a slower acceleration and deceleration than light rail, but still provide good travel time and reliability. Tim mentioned commuter rail technology uses the latest in clean diesel fuels. Finally, Tim mentioned commuter rail vehicle orders could potentially 'piggy back' onto other orders within the country.

Rick Pilgrim, MAG Study Team, responded to a question concerning noise pollution and levels associated with the commuter rail technology. In his experience, Rick mentioned that 90% of noise impact is related to train horns.

Rick Pilgrim outlined the TCRP business model related to participants and relationships in developing commuter rail service. Rick cited a few specifically, including track maintenance. The transit agency, e.g. rail authority, would be responsible for all costs associated with maintenance. Standards are defined by FRA regulations and define limits of agency ownership. The freight railroad identifies needs for continued freight service and defines limits of freight ownership.

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, mentioned that a maintenance facility scenario in the MAG region could potentially be located in the Phoenix area – a facility elsewhere could result in too much deadhead travel, as well as operation cost prohibitive.

Study Goals, Objectives, and Factors

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, explained the purpose of System Study is to evaluate commuter rail options for the MAG region and the potential connecting routes immediately adjacent to the MAG region. This includes establishing priorities for implementing commuter rail service, using criteria such as ridership potential, operating strategies, and associated capital and operating costs. Tim added that the System Study would evaluate existing freight corridors and possible rail extensions, identified within the MAG Commuter Rail Strategic Plan.

Tim Baldwin further explained that the System Study would explore ridership forecasting (using MAG TransCAD model), evaluate the Southeast Valley for commuter rail service options, and provide railroad coordination – developing a long-term relationship to support the potential implementation of commuter rail service. Other goals and objectives include input/participation in statewide and inter-regional planning processes, prioritize or rank potential commuter rail corridors, and coordinate with other two commuter rail studies (Grand Avenue and Yuma West).

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, shared that there are several factors associated with the development of commuter rail service.

Tim Baldwin mentioned factors include an analysis of operations, stations, and ridership – each providing assumptions and forecast results in the analysis of commuter rail service. Tim mentioned that the first step is to develop initial operating concepts. Then refine initial assumptions based on the High Capacity Transit Study, Commuter Rail Strategic Plan, and the Regional Transit Framework Study.

Tim explained the next step is to refine the operating plan(s), taking into consideration station spacing, run times, and fleet size assumptions.

Tim Baldwin indicated all of these assumptions and modifications provide input into the travel demand model (MAG model). Ridership forecasts are then developed from the model. Model runs include stand alone corridors, as well as interline or network scenarios. These scenario runs would begin in July.

With respect to cost estimation (capital, operating and maintenance), Tim Baldwin explained the following assumptions:

Capital costs:

1. Grand/Yuma Corridors: based on individual infrastructure components
2. System Study Corridors: unit per-mile costs based on current industry costs, engineering, constructability issues, and identified railroad issues

Operating and maintenance costs:

1. All corridors: based on analysis of comparable systems

Maria Hyatt, City of Phoenix, asked whether the study would address potential ways for operations to be funded. Rick Pilgrim confirmed the studies would touch on this issue – but may not include an allocation strategy.

Kevin Wallace, Maricopa Association of Governments, mentioned that there will likely be regional scenarios developed to support such a service – this would truly be a regional system.

With regard to prioritizing corridors, Kevin Wallace asked whether a weighting could be applied. Rick Pilgrim, MAG Study Team, confirmed that weighting could be applied – it is a preference up to MAG.

Dave Moody, City of Peoria, mentioned that with respect to land use, high density nodes are not captured in the MAG TransCAD model. Dave added that this results in not a fair assessment of land use compatibility.

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, confirmed that land use may or may not be easily weighed in this process.

Kevin Wallace asked how freight railroad compatibility would be weighed in this process. Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, responded by an example such as a corridor that may rank poorly in land use or ridership, may rank higher in freight railroad compatibility if the railroad allows use of right of way.

Tim Baldwin added that this relationship will eventually be evaluated when a meeting with the railroad(s) occurs.

Rick Pilgrim, MAG Study Team, mentioned that if commuter rail service frequency was quite high, the system would likely require its own track. Rick added that the MAG region brings opportunities for shared use of right of way, e.g. multimodal transportation corridors.

Rick Pilgrim mentioned that the Grand Avenue corridor is a relatively busy freight corridor, operating up to 10 trains per day. Rick added that the Yuma West line is not as busy, operating about one train per day. The Yuma West line characteristics include make-up trains, taking train cars to sites for industrial uses.

Regarding job centers in the Phoenix region, Rick Pilgrim mentioned most are distributed throughout the valley, not forming downtown as a primary location.

David Maestas, Pinal County, asked which population estimate data is being used within the study processes. Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, mentioned MAG data is being used solely – however CAAG population projection information may be used in consultation with MAG staff.

Schedule

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, outlined the System Study schedule, as presented in GANTT chart format. The System Study will essentially conclude its evaluation and provide implementation plan before the end of the calendar year.

Coordination/Milestones

Tim Baldwin, MAG Study Team, outlined project coordination and major milestones associated with the System Study. Project coordination includes Project Management Team meetings, System Review Team meetings, MAG Committee briefings, and stakeholder meetings. Major milestones described included project initiation, corridor definition, a financial analysis, detailed evaluation (including ridership forecasting), and corridor prioritization.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will occur in August 2009.